

Intro – video of “Joy”

What IS Joy? What is that happiness that expresses itself with a smile, or a laugh, or even tears?

Here’s a thought: Joy comes from **fulfillment**.

When we finish exams. Or we finish weeding a garden. When we finish our work for the week. When we see a good friend after many years. When we get married. These are all things that we wait for. Things that take time. And at the end there is a sense of fulfillment, or completion.

But while joy comes from this sense of completion, it’s not always about feeling **good**. Often joy comes with pain. The birth of a child. Running a marathon. Surviving a terrible tragedy. Studying for exams... Often, joy comes **through** pain and **with** pain, and even **because** of pain. **Joy** can sometimes even be the **result** of **suffering** for what is **right or good**. This is what James calls “**pure joy**”... Look at verses 2-3:

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Trials bring joy because they PRODUCE something in us. The pain of labour brings joy when it PRODUCES a baby. When our faith is tested, it can bring joy when it PRODUCES perseverance in us. Because that perseverance, when it finishes its work, brings us maturity and completion, so we are not lacking anything.

III – I don’t like not finishing things.

I like finishing my dinner.

I like finishing building things.

I like finishing a good distance run.

I like finishing the gardening. The ironing. The dishes.

I don’t **always** like **doing** these things, but I always like **finishing** them. Completing them.

But here’s what I think the issue is for us today that James brings out: We often focus on finishing, completing, the things that aren’t really that important. The book of James challenges us to think about what things in life we really get our joy from – the things we really see as important.

Here at the very beginning of James is the challenge – **do you find joy from persevering in your faith?** Do you find joy in persevering through suffering and trials?

III – At the moment, we all know there are Christians suffering around the world because of their faith. The Muslim group ISIS are forcing Christians in Mosul to leave their homes and everything they own, because of their faith in Jesus. They are facing the threat of losing all they possess, including threats of violence and even death.

And perhaps we can’t really relate well to that in our country at the moment. So what are the trials WE face here? Where do **we** need to persevere, so we will find maturity and joy?

I think it’s worth focusing on just one thing today: **Worldliness**.

As Christians we need to persevere in **not giving in** to the desire for worldly things. The desire to own a little more. To be a little more comfortable. The desire for wealth and fame. The desire for approval and acceptance of the world.

It's difficult to persevere when the world is telling us what is important. In verse 5, James encourages us: **ask for God's wisdom**, and trust God will provide what we need. When we pursue a career, or \ we pursue financial security, when we pursue things for our family – ask for God's wisdom to guide you, and **trust** his wisdom, so that we're not chasing after things that aren't really important.

Verse 9 says that if you are in a **humble** situation – if you are considered LOW in the eyes of the world, take pride in **that**. If you are rich, take pride in being humiliated. Why does he say this? Because all that we HAVE in this world will pass away. So take pride if you don't have much in this world – it means you don't have much to lose! And if you do have a lot, which is probably most of us, take pride when you are humbled. Take pride when you are reminded through your circumstances that this worldly stuff doesn't matter. When you fall on hard financial times – take pride that you're being reminded of what is really important.

You see, this is the mind shift that James wants us to have – fro verse 16:

16 *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

Don't be deceived by the world, or the things of the world, that change like shifting shadows. Every GOOD gift is from God. Everything that **matters** is from God. Everything that **lasts** is from God. Don't be deceived by listening to what the **world** thinks is important. Persevere with God's wisdom. Persevere putting aside worldly thinking. Otherwise, we **will** be deceived. And we will not find joy.

III – Let me tell you about a young married couple I knew. Let's call them Susan and John. They were people who trusted God. But in one particular year, life got really difficult for them. They struggled with some worldly things. John struggled with holding down a job. Susan struggled with not being able to have children. They both struggled with sickness in their families. The death of a parent. The sickness of another parent. Life was hard for them that year. But they **didn't** persevere. These things became more and more important to them. Work. Children. Health. That's what really mattered to them. They stopped trusting God. They gave up listening to his wisdom. Why? Because they'd been deceived. Deceived into thinking that these worldly things were more important than trusting God. Because the world told them work and kids and health is important. That's what matters. That's what they focused on. That's what drove their lives. And when those things were taken away, they had nothing. They had no joy.

And we all struggle with these sorts of things. We all struggle to listen to God's wisdom rather than the world's. But what God promises us is that if we persevere, if we continue to seek God's wisdom, we will find completion, fulfillment, in him. And what HE offers cannot be taken away.

No matter how much of the world we own or have, it will never be enough. And God knows that. We can only have "enough", we can only be fulfilled, completed, if we put God's wisdom first:
Every good and perfect gift is from above.

So how do we "tune out" the world's wisdom? How do we focus on God's wisdom? On what's really important? From verse 21:

21 *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

The way we focus on God's wisdom is by turning away from the evil that is so prevalent in our world, and turning to his Word, the Bible. Reading it. Listening to it. Then DOING it.

III – Have you noticed that when you buy some things these days, there are usually **two** sets of instructions. There are the detailed instructions, and then there are the quick “set up” instructions. One gives you every possible detail. But the other one just gives you the basics. It outlines the key stuff to get started.

Often when we try to “straighten up” our lives, we look at the details. We look at the million things that we need to do and the 2 million things we need to stop doing, and it can be overwhelming.

But what James says is this:

Pick up God's word. Read a bit. Then go and do it. Don't sit down for 3 months, read the whole bible in one go, and then get up and try to do it all. Read some today. Go and do it. Read some tomorrow. Go and do it. Read it each day, go and do it. Make a change today. Another change next week.

Just like every morning when you see your face in the mirror – you have a good idea what it looks like. You don't stand in the mirror staring at it for 2 hours every day committing the position of every freckle to memory.

We aren't being asked to sit down with the Bible and try to memorise it all and get all the details perfect before we DO anything. Read a bit. Go and do it.

Verse 27 is a great example of this:

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

It's so basic isn't it? Look after widows and orphans. Keep away from the pollution of the world. Help people who need help. Keep away from unhelpful stuff. Wealth. Power. Adultery. Coveting. Pornography. Greed. You don't have to memorise the Bible to know that this is how God wants us to live!

God's word is not complicated. Yes, there are parts that can be a little confusing and require some deep thought. But as we pick it up and read it each day, God will help us to take away just that little something that we can put into practice. One bit at a time. One day at a time.

Religion that God accepts is the religion that reads and bit, and **does** it.

Do not be deceived by the world. Persevere in following God's wisdom and don't give up. It's not always easy. It's often painful. But it will bring you fulfillment in your life – it will bring PURE joy – and that's a promise from God.

Let's pray.

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:
Greetings.

Trials and Temptations

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. **4** Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **5** If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. **6** But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. **7** That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. **8** Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. **10** But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. **11** For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; **14** but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. **15** Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

16 Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. **17** Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Listening and Doing

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **20** because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. **21** Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **23** Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror

24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. **25** But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. **27** Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.